

The First Press

First Presbyterian Church Gastonia

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Sindi's Tienda is a shop that sells “icees,” and is one of the many small woman-owned businesses thanks to The Guatemala Microloan Project.

Caring For All of Creation

Written by Rev. Brad Simpson

Then God said, “Let us make humans in our image, according to our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over the cattle and over all the wild animals of the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” – Genesis 1:26

I am writing this letter on **April 22 (Earth Day)**, a significant designated day on our annual calendar. I’m thankful that we have this day set aside to reflect on our calling to care for all of God’s creation. God commissions us to have dominion over creation. Our response involves multiple areas of concern, including recycling, conservation of natural resources, protection of all species of life, consideration of the environmental impact of commercial projects we undertake, and the promotion of activities (e.g., the Rotary Community Garden) that provide opportunities to care for the fruits of the soil.

As a child, I remember the joy of this time of the year as we tilled and planted a garden on the lower terrace of our backyard. I was responsible for plowing the plot of land, and throughout the summer, I tended the garden, weeded, and harvested the vegetables that made their way to the dinner table. A garden provides so many opportunities to teach children that “having dominion” over creation involves us nurturing and caring for the land that God has given us. Having dominion also involves us respecting the beautiful variety of wildlife that is everywhere in our community.

On the day after Easter, Julius and I traveled to Carowinds and, along with the experience of riding several roller coasters, we stopped at one ride where there was a line of people waiting. Unexpectedly, as the line moved forward, we noticed a robin’s nest within a few feet of the crowd. As the mother bird fed her children, I realized once again that the promise of God to provide for all of creation is fulfilled. We are called to care for this creation as God cares for us, and as we fulfill these responsibilities, life will continue to be good.

The mother bird that calls Carowinds her home reminds us that each day is “Earth Day.” Each day provides new opportunities to be good stewards of God’s Creation.

Brad Simpson



Photo courtesy of Julius Fowler

Empowering Women Across Borders: The Guatemala Microloan Project

Written by Wendy Gem

In a remarkable display of international solidarity and faith-driven action, FPC and Presbyterian Women from the Presbytery of Western North Carolina (PWNC) have partnered with their counterparts in Guatemala to uplift women through the Guatemala Microloan Project. This initiative, born from a 2013 women’s retreat in Guatemala, aims to provide Guatemalan women with opportunities to grow in self-esteem, hope, and freedom while helping them develop sources of economic income for themselves and their families.

The project operates by organizing groups of 15–20 women in various communities, offering them microloans to start or expand small businesses. These ventures range from selling food and tortillas to raising livestock and selling clothing. Beyond financial support, the program emphasizes education and training, covering business management and project administration. Participants also engage in workshops that discuss the value of women and the recognition of their work, fostering a sense of community and mutual support.

Presbyterian Women’s involvement has been pivotal. Their initial funding and continuous support through prayer, courage, and financial contributions have been instrumental in the project’s success. In 2018, a grant from the Presbyterian Women’s Thank Offering enabled the formation of two new microloan groups, expanding the project’s reach and impact. The project’s administration is managed by two staff members in Guatemala, who provide education, training, and support to participants, treating them with compassion and respect.

The Guatemala Microloan Project exemplifies how faith communities can come together to create meaningful change. By empowering women economically and socially, the initiative not only improves individual lives but also strengthens entire communities.

Please consider supporting this impactful project through a donation by scanning the QR code.



If you are interested in serving as a delegate during the next missions trip to Guatemala this fall, contact Margaret Mackie at 704-853-6404 for more information.

MICROLOANS ARE SUCCESSFUL



Lydia has been able to greatly expand her store inventory thanks to her participation in the Microloan Project.



Microloan participant sells sunglasses in her shop.



Participants learn business management in workshops.

Save the Date:
Vacation Bible School



July 14-18, 9:00 am to 1:00 pm
Work Week (Anyone is welcome to stop by and help)

July 20, 3:00 to 4:00 pm
VBS Volunteer Meeting

July 20, from 4:30 to 5:30 pm
VBS Kickoff Sunday

Monday, July 21 — Thursday, July 24, 9:00 am to Noon
Vacation Bible School

Curious and Courageous: New Committee, New Direction

Written by Charles Gallman



curiosity (noun): the desire to learn or know about anything; inquisitiveness. **courage** (noun): the quality of mind or spirit that enables a person to face change without fear.

If you have listened to Pastor Dan's recent sermons or perhaps heard the murmuring of the congregation, you may have noticed the winds of change beginning to blow! Since 1882, FPC-Gastonia has continuously strived to be faithful to God's will.

As our community - and the church have continued to grow and change, the Session believes that now is the time to revisit and refresh the church's mission, vision, and values so that we can continue to be faithful to God's call, offering ministries and missions that equip our members and serve the people of our community today and into the future.

To facilitate this discernment, the Session has formed the **Curiosity and Courage Committee**, made up of Charles Gallman, Mike Wallace, Amy Spencer, Jessica Stewart, Malinda Lowry, Coerte Voorhees, and John Mudd. The outcome of this process will be new Mission and Vision Statements, refreshed Core Values, and a Strategic Plan for the church, guided by the Holy Spirit working through ALL of us.

Everyone will have opportunities to give input and help discern where God is leading us. In the meantime, please hold the C&C Committee, the Session, and First Presbyterian Church in your prayers.

Faith Fund Award

Written by Barbara Yarbrough



On Saturday, April 5th, women representing the churches in the Western North Carolina Presbytery met for their spring gathering at First Presbyterian Church Gastonia. During this gathering, the Women of the Western North Carolina Presbytery presented the 2025 Presbyterian Women of the Presbytery of Western North Carolina Faith Fund Award to the Dream Center Academy. First Presbyterian Church of Gastonia accepted this award on behalf of the Dream Center Academy (DCA).

The Faith Fund of the Presbyterian Women of Western North Carolina makes an annual award to a benevolent church or community project within the Western NC Presbytery. As the host church for this spring's gathering, the Women's Council of FPC applies to the project for which they wish to receive the funds. This may be a project in WPNC that they created, are involved in, and/or support. FPC and Women's Council have provided financial support to DCA, and the diaconate has provided meals during the summer program.

Dream Center Academy is an "out-of-school-time" program designed to provide a one-of-a-kind academic enrichment program for students in western Gaston County. The program was designed to support students through their seven-year journey from the summer before the sixth grade through high school graduation, with a vision for them to become college/career-ready graduates and productive

citizens within their communities. The program provides tutoring, college tours, and other academic support plus life enrichment experiences such as job shadowing, book clubs, cooking classes, athletic training, family engagement, community service projects, field trips, and more.

The program targeted students in the Hunter Huss High School district and its feeder schools. This area has seen dramatic changes in socioeconomic over the years. It is also an area with a higher minority population, more single-parent households, and higher levels of poverty. 2024 saw Dream Center Academy's first graduating class, with 100% of the class being college/career-ready. Of this group, eighteen attend college, and two attend trade school.

Earlier this year, the 21st Century Federal Grant Proposal scores were in the top tier. Recently, staff and students were recognized at the NC State Board of Education meeting.

Two current high school seniors spoke about how much the Dream Center Academy has meant to them. One of the young men, who has experienced homelessness, is graduating from Highland School of Technology this spring with a 4.5 GPA average.

Upcoming Events

CONNECT AND GROW THIS SUMMER

YOUNG PRESBYTERIAN SUMMER TRIPS

Overnight Lock-In

May 23, 8:00 pm — 8:00 am, Fellowship Hall

Mini-Mission Trip

Thursday, June 5, 9:00 am — 4:00 pm, off-site
Thursday, August 7, 9:00 am — 4:00 pm, off-site

PASSPORT KIDS

June 30 — July 3, Montreat Conference Center

YOUTH GROUP SUMMER TRIPS

PASSPORT MISSIONS

June 15-19, Banner Elk, NC

Day trip to Charlotte

Saturday, June 28, 8:00 am — 4:00 pm

Day trip to White Water Center

Saturday, July 26, 8:00 am — 7:00 pm

Day trip to Montreat, NC

Saturday, August 2, 8:00 am — 7:00 pm

SECOND SUNDAY BREAKFAST

9:00 — 9:50 am, Fellowship Hall
June, July, and August

WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDY

2nd and 4th Wednesdays
10:30 — 11:30 am, Confirmation Room

Contact **Mary Taneti** for more information.



Masterpiece Moments: Tending God's Garden

May 18, 2025 | Noon - 2:00 PM

Rotary Community Garden

You are invited to the next Masterpiece Moments as we gather for good food and meaningful fellowship. Davidson Hobson will provide smoked BBQ, and we ask everyone to bring a side dish to share. After lunch, we will work together to tend the garden and enjoy the beauty of God's creation.

RSVP by scanning the QR code or contact the Church Office to save your spot!

FOR THE LATEST UPCOMING EVENTS, VISIT OUR WEBSITE
www.fpcgastonia.org/announcements

USPS IDENTIFICATION STATEMENT

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Welcome New Member Harriet Hawn.

Service Views and Attendance

Date	TRADITIONAL SERVICE		THRIVE SERVICE	
	Service	Livestream	Service	Livestream
March 30	132	102	82	—
April 6	161	89	—	—
April 13	203	110	125	—
April 20	218	70	114	31

Please note service views do not include those watching via closed circuit stream at Covenant Village.